

News Release

Jacobson's Journey to UMC and Back Again

By Krista Lemos on Wednesday, August 17, 2005

Any college student who has ever felt confused, isolated and stressed to the max because of uncertainties over whether or not to switch majors or transfer to another school should have Beth Jacobson on their cell phone speed dial list.

That's because Jacobson has switched majors. And not only has she transferred to a different university, she transferred back to the one at which she started, the University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC). In less than one calendar year, Jacobson is confident that she's already lived "both the worst week of my life and the best week of my life, at least thus far in my life."

Jacobson will be a junior this fall at UMC, majoring in communications, UMC's newest, four-year academic degree program. She'll have an emphasis in sports marketing, and will also minor in coaching. This summer, she's interning in UMC's Office of Development.

She hails from Mayville, ND, but her parents, Doug and Chris, now live and work in Fargo. Her dad is superintendent of the North Central of Barnes County and Wimbledon-Courtenay school districts, and her mom works for What's for Dinner in Fargo. She's the youngest of Doug and Chris' five children and is their only daughter. In other words, she has four older brothers. At 20 years old, Jacobson is six years younger than the youngest of her brothers.

"It's almost like I was an only child, but the older we've gotten the closer we've become," she said.

Her brother, Ben, starred for the University of North Dakota men's basketball team and coached at North Dakota State University. He's now an assistant coach at Northern Iowa. Ben's success is, in part, driving Beth down a similar path. She'll be an important part of the UMC Golden Eagles Women's basketball team this winter, and hopes to coach someday.

Her story

Basketball was the driving force behind Jacobson's decision to attend UMC as a high school senior in Mayville. She had received some calls from schools with Division III basketball programs, but felt the need to challenge herself by pursuing a Division II program like UMC's. It was Golden Eagle basketball standout Karna Plaine who initially steered Jacobson toward UMC. They'd played against each other in high school, Jacobson explained, and Plaine's parents had nice things to say about UMC once Karna had enrolled at the university. Jacobson subsequently attended a couple games at UMC and chatted with the coaching staff. Then came her "official" visit.

"I loved it. I loved the girls on the team. I just loved everything," she said. "The laptop computers were obviously a plus because you have it all the time and don't have to wait for space in a computer lab, and I loved the way the whole campus was laid out, where everything is all right there for you."

At that time, Jacobson wanted to be a teacher, so she enrolled in UMC's Early Childhood Education program. She figured she'd finish up somewhere else by getting her elementary education degree.

She switched gears after her freshman year, deciding that she wanted to teach high school math. So she transferred to another university to pursue an education degree and play basketball.

But even before her transfer was official, Jacobson said she had "an inkling" that she wasn't making the right decision. But she didn't want to appear indecisive, so she stuck with it.

"I kept telling myself, 'Once you get there everything will be OK,'" she recalled. "So I went, and about a week later..well, I could just tell from day one that it wasn't for me. But even before I left UMC I had a feeling that going somewhere else wasn't for me. It was just a different atmosphere (at the new university) that didn't fit my personality. It was a difficult time, a frustrating time."

So she spent a weekend in Fargo with her parents, seeking their guidance. Her mom, whom Beth describes as methodical, "told me to think everything through slowly and write down all the pros and cons," Jacobson said. Her dad, on the other hand, recommended giving the new university some time and said she'd like it eventually. "We were talking in circles," Jacobson recalled. Seeking further advice, she called all of her brothers, too, and as many friends as she could think of.

Then she called her coach at UMC, Mike Curfman, and asked if she could come back. She had left the team on good terms, and said Curfman told her she'd be welcomed back if she decided to return.

"It was about the most stressful week of my life," Jacobson said. "Part of me thought I was being irrational, but another part of me just knew that I had to come back to UMC."

So that's what she did. Fall classes were just starting, so she ended up missing only a few days.

But Jacobson still wasn't on the right track. She returned to UMC's Early Childhood Education (ECE) program, figuring she'd get her degree and "then figure out what to do."

She knew that what she wanted to do was coach. After another year in the ECE program, she sat down with a couple of her coaches, who told her that if she really wanted to coach, she probably should try UMC's Sports and Recreation Management program or the new Communications program.

Admitting that a communications degree seemed like a "bizarre" route to a coaching career, Jacobson changed her tune after speaking to faculty members in the program.

"There are so many options to fall back on with a communications degree, so many ways I can go," she said. "I really like to write and I love working with all kinds of people. Suddenly things started to make sense."

She made the major switch official last spring. This fall, she'll start anew as a communications student at UMC. The sports marketing emphasis and coaching minor will help as she seeks to start her coaching career after graduation. She's planning on attending graduate school after UMC, exactly where will depend in large part on where she finds opportunities as a women's basketball graduate assistant.

"Even though that's all up in the air at this point, I finally feel like I'm on the right track," she said. "If I land a coaching position on a team, I should know within a couple years if a long-term coaching career is for me. If it doesn't work out, I'll still have my communications degree."

If the connections she's made in this area mean that she gets a career opportunity around here, she's more than happy with that. But if she has to pick up and move far away to land a job, she's more than open to that, too.

"Finally, I feel like I'm happy with where I'm at, and I'm seeing the future that I want clearly," Jacobson said. "People take the positive attitudes and the positive atmosphere at UMC for granted, I think. I know I did. I'm glad I had to chance to reconsider."

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